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The third way: German–Russian–European Jewish identity in a global Jewish world

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From 1990 until 2008, about 200,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union migrated to Germany. At the same time, Germany re-unified and took its place at the centre of the new Europe. In a global world, in which people maintain multiple homes, languages, identities and means of communication across thousands of miles, these migrants challenged German Jewish notions of identity, rootedness and community. Their particular Soviet and post-Soviet approaches to these issues also challenged the liberalising tendencies of an emerging European Jewish identity. This review essay examines how Soviet and post-Soviet Jewish migration to Germany interacted and intersected with new notions of European Jewish identity in Germany, with special focus on Berlin, the largest, most cosmopolitan Jewish community in Germany. Rather than continuing to bemoan the ‘failed integration’ of post-Soviet Jewry into some notion of fixed German Jewish identity or into liberal European notions of identity, a global approach would allow for the co-existence of many Jewish identities in a diverse German Jewish community.

Keywords: Russian; Jewish; German; Berlin; pluralism; diversity

On 7 October 1991, the first direct flight from Moscow to Tel Aviv landed at Ben Gurion Airport with 150 new immigrants aboard. Two months later, the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia dissolved the Soviet Union, marking a new era in global and Jewish history. Between 1989 and 2006 more than one million Jews and their non-Jewish relatives from the former Soviet Union settled in Israel. About 400,000 emigrated to the United States, and as many as 220,000 went to Germany. In these new places, which for some are new homes, for others way-stations to other places, they are encountering Jews with little understanding of Soviet Jewish history and experience.

The interaction of Soviet and post-Soviet Jews with Jews in Israel, the US, and in Germany raises complicated questions about Jewish community and identity: who counts as a ‘real’ Jew? Who gets labelled immigrant, refugee, repatriate, tourist or migrant worker? Which Jews see Germany as home, and which see it is a refuge before moving onto someplace or returning ‘home’? How does the presence of large numbers of Russian Jews in Germany and Israel force us to ask ‘what does it mean to be a German or Israeli Jew?’¹ Soviet and post-Soviet Jews, who often maintain multiple passports, multiple homes and multiple languages, make us re-think the meaning of homeland and exile and put notions of diversity at the centre of conversations about global Jewish life.

Examining the interactions of post-Soviet Jewish migrants with diverse Jewish people and institutions in Germany, with a focus on Berlin, reveals tensions among the many different conceptions of Jewish identity: (1) what might be called a German Jewish

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establishment identity generally defined religiously and regulated in many ways by Germany's official Jewish body, the Central Council (Zentralrat); (2) an emerging post-national approach to European Jewish identity often defined by diversity and feminism, whose institutions tend to come from the US; and (3) a more essentialised and deeply secular, post-Soviet Jewish identity with little institutional organisation in Germany although post-Soviet Jews now occupy leadership roles in some key international Jewish institutions. Oliver Lubrich suggests that Russian Jews in Germany should be seen through a post-colonial lens that emphasizes hybridity and fluidity especially among younger Russian-speaking Jews.² It is of course true that identities and differences are never fixed, and there are plenty of examples of hybridity in post-Soviet Jewish interactions with German Jewry. At the same time, in an era of globalisation, when migration does not necessarily mean permanent residence, when individuals maintain multiple affinities across geographic space and national borders, no one understanding of Jewish identity will necessarily assimilate the others, nor will some single hybrid identity necessarily emerge.³ Rather, the example of Jews in Berlin suggests that these diverse understandings of Jewishness must co-exist, even as they influence each other. A model of globalisation that emphasises diverse identities co-existing, in addition to the necessary emergence of hybrid identities, leaves open the possibility that this potentially creative, yet unresolved, tension should not be seen as 'failed integration'. Rather, it may be what defines Jewish life in Berlin.

Russian-speaking Jews in twenty-first century Berlin

For the past 20 years, Germany's Jewish community has been the fastest growing in the world, from about 30,000 registered in the community at the time of reunification to about 120,000 registered in more recent findings: a 400% increase. In an effort to rectify past wrongs, in 1990, the East German and then the unified German government opened its borders to Jews wanting to settle as *Kontingentsfluchtlinge* (special quota refugees). The state offered post-Soviet Jewry easy access to German residency and generous social benefits. And settle they did. Today, Russian-speaking immigrants constitute a large majority of German Jewry, especially outside of Berlin. Jeffrey Peck argues that 85% of the Jewish population of Germany is from the former Soviet Union, and some estimate the number at 90%.⁴

Soviet and post-Soviet Jews' presence in the country was initially hailed as the demographic salvation of a small, aging post-Holocaust German Jewry. Quantitatively, Germany now has one of the largest Jewish populations in Europe. But these Jewish migrants brought with them very different notions of Jewish identity that had been shaped by their particular Soviet Jewish experience. This different approach to *Jewishness*, more than Judaism, created palpable tensions with the Jewish establishment and the official community, the *Gemeinde*, which generally understand Jewishness through the lens of religion.⁵ Post-Soviet Jewish immigrants sometimes don't register with the *Gemeinde*, and even if they wanted to, many of them would not qualify as Jews according to the *Gemeinde*'s traditional, religious definition of Jewish.⁶ In the Soviet Union, Jewishness was both more flexible, in that it could be handed down from a father or mother, but also more fixed, in that it was indelibly marked in one's passport. In either case, Jewishness was much more about *being*, than about *doing* or *believing*, 'Jewish'.

When we do talk about practices, the new Soviet and post-Soviet migrants don't 'act' like their German host communities. They rarely keep kosher and generally do not go to synagogue. Older post-Soviet immigrants often mark 9 May, Victory Day, as the primary holiday to remember the war and Holocaust. This choice in Germany is a doubly ironic

statement of difference. Not only is Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yom Ha-Shoah, second to Victory Day on the Jewish calendars of many Russian Jews, marginalising the classic Western understanding of the Holocaust; they also celebrate the defeat of the country that is now giving them generous social benefits. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that German Jews complain that the Russians don't integrate, do not participate, and do not want to 'be like us'.⁷

Israeli-Russian sociologist Nelly Elias has found that Russian Jews sense this strained relationship and feel more distant from German Jews than from their non-Jewish German neighbours. One of her respondents in a recent study said: 'The local Jews are our main enemies here. They look at us as if we were pigs.'⁸ The presence of immigrants has created palpable tensions. But one thing is clear – the new immigration is transforming German Jewry, just as these immigrants are themselves transformed.

Germany has been here before. These power dynamics resemble those of the 1910s and 1920s, when Yiddish-speaking, traditional Jews fleeing the remains of the Russian Empire ended up in fast-paced Berlin, one of the most important cultural capitals of Europe until the Nazis' rise to power in 1933. The German Jewish establishment saw these migrants as 'too Jewish' – with their clothes, language and even smell – and too de-stabilising of the German Jewish assimilationist project. In the twenty-first century, ironically, the establishment and others see Soviet and post-Soviet Jews as not Jewish enough, or in the words of Rabbi Marcel Ebel, of possibly 'diluting Jewishness'.

The new faces of 'German' Jewry

Scholars studying Russian Jews in Germany have generally not engaged the much larger body of literature on the transformation of German and European Jewry, a historical process that was taking place at exactly the same time as post-Soviet Jews were migrating to Germany. And with the exception of Peck, the body of literature on new European and German Jewish identities and communities rarely recognises the centrality of the mass migration of Soviet and post-Soviet Jews. But I would argue that one cannot understand one without the other, especially in Berlin.

This review essay focuses on Berlin for several reasons. It is the largest and most diverse Jewish community defined by large expatriate communities, a German Jewish establishment, Russian-speaking immigrants, Chabad Lubavitchers, other Orthodox Jews, feminist *havurot* and others. Berlin is also an iconic Jewish centre, more so than any other place in Germany and, arguably, in Europe. Finally, because of this diversity, Russian-speaking Jews fit into a larger Jewish landscape, unlike many smaller towns in which they are a large majority. In the 1990s and 2000s, the state settled most Russian Jewish immigrants outside Berlin for economic reasons. In some German cities, one will find that Russian is by far the most dominant language spoken in any Jewish institution, as Russians make up a huge majority of the Jewish community. Therefore, these smaller German Jewish communities do not conform to the pluralist model that is taking shape in Berlin. By focusing on Berlin, however, we can see how post-Soviet migration, Europeanisation, and global Jewish communities interact with one another.

First, reunification and the merger or incorporation of East German Jewry caused profound trauma for Jewish communities that had operated in different ideological universes for 40 years. Some East German Jews were proud of the fact that after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, it was their government, and not the West German one, that invited Soviet Jews to come, a story that has been lost, along with many of the specificities of East German Jewish culture. Some former East German Jews were also

protective of their distinct understanding of Jewish identity and community, both in terms of the people and institutions.⁹

At about the same time, unified Germany became the centre of the European Union, with its single currency, general legal system and disappearing borders that also destabilised German identity. Sociologist Larisa Remennick, who studied Russian-speaking Jews in Israel, Canada, the US and Germany, found that many of her German respondents saw themselves as European Jews and their acquisition of German residency as a means to a European, not German, identity.¹⁰ The establishment of the European Union has meant new flows of ideas, culture, capital and people in general, and Jews in particular into and out of Germany. In particular, as the relatively inexpensive, cosmopolitan heart of the new Europe, Berlin attracts all kinds of Jewish (and non-Jewish) migrants, most notably American Jewish culture makers and Israeli expatriates. In 2007, 4300 Israelis took German citizenship, up 50% from the year before, and some of them have taken up residency in the country.¹¹ Perhaps as important as the emergence of a pan-European identity has been the emergence of a multicultural German society with Turks, Yugoslavs and others transforming the face, culture and languages of the country.

If German identity was radically destabilised through earlier waves of migration and from monumental political upheaval, it makes sense that German Jewish identity would not be stable. But public figures and some scholars still seem unable to recognise this radically changed landscape. Many keep arguing that post-Soviet Jewish immigrants must fit into some notion of a singular German Jewish identity and community. Ignatz Bubis, the president of the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland (Central Committee of Jews in Germany) at the time of mass migration, did not see the influx of post-Soviet Jews as having any positive effect on German Jewish identity.¹² In addition, a more complicated understanding of Germany's place in the new Europe challenges sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann's distinction between Judaism in Germany and German Judaism. In his understanding, the presence of new Jews may mean a resurgence of Jews living in Germany, but does not mean a resurgence of German Judaism.¹³ It is true that because religious institutions in Germany are financed and controlled by the state, the Zentralrat may have little latitude but to implement the government's Germanising agenda, and thus encourage an assimilation into something called German Judaism. However, especially in Berlin, Jewish communities and identities are emerging beyond the Central Council. And these communities and identities have influence over what the Central Council does. Perhaps, then, a more useful question is what a unitary concept like 'German Judaism' means when Germany in general, and Berlin in particular, has undergone such a radical reformulation?

Berlin has become one of the largest and most visible iconic Jewish landscapes in all of Europe. In the past 20 years, the city's Jewish population has gone from 6000 in 1990 to an estimated 50,000 in 2008, and is made up of post-Soviet migrants, Israeli ex-patriates, American hipsters, ultra-Orthodox Chabad Lubavitch Hasids and a growing Jewish culture and arts scene that is becoming a European hotspot.¹⁴ On the physical Jewish landscape, there are now dozens of new institutions in Berlin that make global news. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish museum, Peter Eisenman's Holocaust memorial, the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue, and other iconic structures have made Berlin an important new tourist destination for Jewish travellers. But the *yeshivas*, Jewish Studies programmes, and a rabbinic seminary in nearby Potsdam also make Berlin an important site for envisioning the future of European Jewish life.

Three examples help illustrate the new face of Berlin Jewry into which post-Soviet Jewry is supposed to be integrating, and simultaneously show the lack of deep engagement

among post-Soviet, German establishment, and the new European, American and Israeli Jews in the city. First, Rabbinerin Gesa Ederberg leads the Berlin congregation that meets in the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue. Ederberg is a female Jew-by-choice from Tübingen, Germany, who trained to become a rabbi at the Conservative/Masorti Movement's Machon Schechter in Jerusalem. She became rabbi of the synagogue in 2007, a position appointed by the official *Gemeinde*, making her the first female *Gemeinde* rabbi in Berlin. Perhaps because the Berlin community is more open to pluralism than any other place in Germany and is also the least 'Russian' of any German Jewish community, the *Gemeinde* hired a female Conservative/Masorti rabbi.¹⁵ She and her husband live in Charlottenburg in the heart of the official Jewish community of Berlin and near the large Russian-speaking community.

Her community is made up of all of Berlin's unlikely Jewish suspects – some long-time German Jews, American expatriates (who prefer an egalitarian synagogue), many women, some gays and lesbians, and some Israelis, who often become acquainted with liberal Judaism in Germany, not in Israel. There are relatively few Russian speakers in the community, likely reflecting most post-Soviet Jews' lack of connection to religion, let alone a liberal egalitarian approach to Judaism and Jewish life. As some like to joke, the synagogue a secular Russian Jew does not go to had better be Orthodox!¹⁶ The synagogue's website is in German with information for English and Hebrew-speaking visitors, but has nothing in Russian, a sign that the synagogue is not making explicit outreach to the Russian-speaking Jewish community in Berlin.

Second, Rabbi Josh Spinner is the head rabbi at Ronald Lauder Foundation's yeshiva, located on the grounds of Berlin's Rykestrasse synagogue in the trendy Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood. Spinner was born in the United States and raised in Canada. He studied at *yeshivot* in Toronto and Jerusalem, and attended Columbia University in New York City. After spending two years in Minsk, Belarus, working in outreach, Rabbi Spinner returned to New York and was ordained at the Orthodox Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in 2000. Shortly afterwards Spinner moved to Berlin and established programmes, which grew into the *yeshiva*. He lives near the *yeshiva* with his wife and three children and serves as the Vice President of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, one of several American non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have great influence on the German Jewish scene.

Spinner has been outspoken about his criticism of the *Gemeinde*'s approach to Russian Jewry and has worked hard to attract Russian Jews to the *yeshiva*. Its website features stories about post-Soviet Jews rediscovering their Judaism through the *yeshiva*, and even some in the *yeshiva*'s leadership are post-Soviet Jews. However the website is only in German and English. Spinner has the luxury of his deeply oppositional stance to the *Gemeinde* as his operation is not government funded. Instead, it gets its institutional support from the Lauder Foundation, one of the biggest funders of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Spinner sees a future confrontation between establishment Jews, who foolishly alienate post-Soviet Jews, and post-Soviet Jewry, which will soon come to take power over many of these centralised institutions. Spinner predicts a day of reckoning when the older establishment will, in his words, 'get it on the head'.

Finally, Jalda Rebling leads the non-*Gemeinde* community Ohel Ha-chiddusch (Tent of Renewal), a small *minyan* connected with the American Renewal Movement. Rebling is a Dutch-born, East German Yiddish theatre actress turned Renewal spiritual leader and cantor in Berlin.¹⁷ She was active in Yiddish cultural activities in East Germany and was connected to the orthodox Adas Yisroel congregation, established in the 1980s in East Berlin and a community that maintained its independence from the united community after reunification. It even receives state funding despite its non-official community status,

something Rebling is quite proud of.¹⁸ Like Ederberg, Rebling got ordained outside of Europe, in her case going to Colorado to study with Renewal movement founder Rabbi Zalman Schacter Shalomi and Cantor Jack Kessler. Her Berlin community is deeply feminist and enmeshed in a European-wide network of small, feminist Renewal communities.¹⁹ She and her partner, the Jewish conceptual artist, Anna Adam, live in a warehouse in the less-expensive Wedding neighbourhood, and often host the community at their loft. Rebling is outspokenly critical of the *Gemeinde* as an antiquated gatekeeper of Jewish life in a Germany whose Jews are innovating faster than its official leadership can handle.²⁰ Her community receives no money from the *Gemeinde*, and because of this, the group struggles to grow. As much as Rebling would like to attract Russian Jews to her community, the feminist liturgy and mostly female community does not meet the expectations of most post-Soviet Jews.²¹

If one wants to find Jewish communal space in which all of these different kinds of Jews interact, one place to look is Limmud Deutschland, a three-day cross-communal festival of Jewish learning that has taken place annually since 2007. Limmud Deutschland uses a British model of Jewish community building that undermines the very idea of an official *Gemeinde*: there are no hierarchies, no titles, no membership dues, and no tests to determine Jewish observance. For this reason, most Orthodox Jewish leaders do not participate in Limmud. For the purposes of understanding community integration, one of Limmud's most radical acts is its official tri-lingualism: German, Russian and English.²² By including Russian as an official language and even having some learning sessions take place in Russian, the organisers of Limmud make a clear attempt to reach out to the Russian community.²³ In fact, I would argue that by having Russian as an official language and having Russians on the organising team, Limmud is trying to break down the 'integration as assimilation' model that has guided the German Jewish community's relationship to post-Soviet Jewry. This is more than outreach to Russian-speakers. This suggests that post-Soviet Jews *are* the Limmud Deutschland community. The 2009 conference included such important discussions as 'Jewish according to your Soviet passport but not according to the community,' co-facilitated by Ederberg and Natasha Verzhbovskaia, a Russian co-facilitator. According to journalist Igal Avidan, some Russian participants, many of whom come from smaller German communities, see Limmud as an opportunity to participate in *German* Jewish community but in their mother tongue.²⁴

In addition to German and Russian, by making English an official language, the organisers, including the American-born director, Toby Axelrod, recognise that Germany is enmeshed in an emerging European (and more global) Jewish community that transcends national boundaries, as participants come from the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Israel and elsewhere. For the emerging European Jewish community, English is becoming the *lingua franca*. Unlike the *Gemeinde*-sponsored Oranienburgerstrasse synagogue, which is by definition a *national*, not pan-European, institution, Limmud Deutschland is trying to build a community for all Jews in Germany, as opposed to building a community for so-called German Jews.²⁵

How do post-Soviet Jews fit into this new vision of a German Jewish community that does not 'tolerate', 'integrate' or 'assimilate' but rather transforms in order to include a diversity of Jewish experiences under the rubric 'German Jewish community'? The Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt held a major conference and exhibition on Russian Jews in Germany in 2009–10. The project was developed by Dr Dmitrii Belkin, a Russian-speaking scholar of Jewish history, whose family is connected to a liberal Jewish community in Frankfurt.²⁶ This was the first large-scale, public attempt to make sense of the mass migration of Russian Jews to Germany. It is surprising that post-Soviet Jews – with

their radically global view of the Jewish world, their sheer numbers, and their high level of education, let alone their ability to bring together thousands for a Yiddish concert in the Kremlin or a Limmud gathering in Russia – are not at the centre of conversation about German Jewish life. Perhaps this is because those in power in the German Jewish community still struggle to see Jews in Germany as a pluralistic, multicultural, multilingual community, rather than as a community defined by common language, experience or understanding of Jewish identity.

German-Russian-European Jewish identity in a global Jewish world

If it is surprising that Russians are not at the top of the German Jewish agenda, it is also surprising that Germany – with its growing, dynamic Jewish community, of course rife with internal problems – is not at the centre of global conversation about the future of Jewish life. This may be because it is hard for many people outside of Europe to think of the continent as a Jewish home. Most global Jewish institutions still operate in a classic Diaspora model that only sees Jewish life now, and therefore a Jewish future, in Israel or the United States. But if one saw Jewish communities and identities more flexibly and looked at where innovations are happening, one would have to look at Germany.

With its quarter-million strong Jewish population, Germany could become a crossroads for a multicultural, post-national European Jewish future. On one axis is the transnational Russian-speaking Jewish population. On the other axis is Germany, especially Berlin, that is a reservoir of something we might call a European Jewish identity and community: a flexible, less centralised (post-*Gemeinde*?), multiethnic, multilingual, nexus of Russian speakers, female spiritual leaders, black-hat Hasids of all ethnicities, Jews-by-choice (and aspiring Jews-by-choice), Israeli dual citizens, American Jewish culture makers, and a so-called German Jewish ‘establishment’, that itself is the product of a post- Second World War *mélange* of European Jewish communities and identities. As Sander Gilman suggests about the so-called establishment, ‘these “German” Jews ... represent a coalition of individuals from a wide range of traditions, and they all understand themselves as Jewish participants in German culture.’²⁷

I would argue that it is more fruitful to see Berlin’s Jews shaping what Diana Pinto calls ‘European Jewish space’.²⁸ Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany, European Jewish leaders have been discussing what European Jews’ role in the world would be. Would they primarily advocate for pro-Israeli politics in a Europe that was ambivalent about Israeli policies? Would they fight anti-Semitism in the lands of the Holocaust, where ghosts of Jew-hatred lurked everywhere? Or would they build Jewish culture in a Europe that would serve as global Jews’ ‘third pillar’, in the words of Michael May, former executive director of the European Council of Jewish Communities.²⁹ Clive Lawton, co-founder of Limmud, the British phenomenon that spawned Limmuds around the world like Limmud Deutschland, defines the third pillar as somewhere between the American and Israeli models: ‘[Being] a Jew in North America is essentially personal, individual ... while in Israel the model is ‘nationalized, that is, managed and defined by the State ... I wish to point up a third model ... that of European Jewry, centered on the contested but distinct framework of “community”.’³⁰

Lawton may be correct in seeing European Jewry as a third pillar of the global Jewish community, one based not on the individual or the nation but on something called ‘community’, a diverse group of people choosing to come together and be responsible for one another, because they have something in common. In November 2008, the Joint Distribution Committee’s International Centre for Community Development released the

results of a major study of European Jewish leaders.³¹ By European, the researchers included everything from Britain to the Baltics, from Sweden to Turkey, but interestingly excluded the former Soviet Union.³² This 113-page report is the first comprehensive analysis of the opinions of Europe's Jewish leadership, both professional and lay, and reveals much about how Europe's leaders see their future. And they do not see their future in Israel or the United States.

First, the demographics of the leaders in the survey reflect a changing European Jewish landscape. The largest number of respondents identified themselves as 'just Jewish' or 'secular' (38%), 11% more than those who identified as Hasidic/Orthodox/Modern Orthodox (27%). Thirty percent of respondents self-identified as Conservative, Masorti, Reform or Liberal Jews. These numbers tell us that the days when an Orthodox establishment ruled the European Jewish landscape no longer exists, and that those official institutions, like the chief rabbinate of most European countries, that are still primarily run by Orthodox Jews do not reflect the background of the majority of Jewish leaders in Europe.

The study asked respondents to talk about the major challenges facing European Jewry. First on the list was the rising rates of mixed marriage; second, the alienation of Jews from Jewish life; and third, the declining knowledge about Judaism and Jewish practices. (Anti-Semitism ranked a distant ninth) (JDC study, 10–11). Although intermarriage, an issue central to Russian-Jewish integration given the high rate of intermarriage, was identified as the most serious concern, and for some intermarriage was seen as a demographic issue, responses to that concern varied widely. Reform and liberal Jewish leaders suggested that a more flexible, open means of welcoming interfaith families into Jewish communities paved a path to the future, while Orthodox leaders called on further reinforcements to encourage a decline in intermarriage.

When it came to communal membership and affiliation, only 27% of respondents thought that *only* halachic Jews should be allowed to become members of a Jewish community, even though this is the rule for all chief rabbinate across Europe. This suggests a huge disjuncture between current policy and where leaders would like to see their communities. By far, the most popular criteria for being considered Jewish were: one Jewish parent (patrilineal *or* matrilineal) or conversation to Judaism by a rabbi of *any* denomination, with 72% of respondents agreeing with both of those criteria. However, the choice 'anyone who considers him/herself Jewish', which has become more popular in the United States, was not popular with most European Jewish leaders. Perhaps Lawton was right. European Jewish leaders are paving a 'third way' and see American Jews as too individualistic and fragmented and their current European structure as too centralised and rigid.

The survey also asked respondents to fill in an open-ended section, and not surprisingly, the three most common themes were leadership and governance, pluralism and inclusiveness, and Jewish education, culture and tradition. These issues reflect the changing nature of power, questions of Jewish identity, and Jewish knowledge in the European Jewish community, and they emphasise quality over quantity. Interestingly, all quotes in the open-ended section were left in the original language *except* those responding in Russian, because surveyors 'felt that relatively few people would be able to understand such quotes and that, therefore, their message would not receive the attention it deserves'. Surveyors showed their sensitivity to Russian Jews by having the online survey available in English, French, German and Russian.

Finally, the survey asked leaders about something we might call a European Jewish community and identity, as distinct from other Jewish identities. Most respondents agreed

that there is some unique perspective and relationship among European Jews, not shared by Jews in Israel, the United States and elsewhere, but the survey did not investigate how European Jewish identity differs. Lawton suggests a flexible notion of community as the defining principle of European Jewish identity. Sandra Lustig and Ian Leveson, in their book *Turning the Kaleidoscope*, argue that 'diversity is the defining characteristic of European Jewry'.³³

And here is where the dynamic tension shaping the future of Jewish life in Germany lies. A definition based on diversity or flexible notions of community is something that may feel challenging to post-Soviet Jews' notion of Jewish identity that was indelibly written on passports, biologically passed on through parents, and is religiously embodied in Orthodox Judaism, even if most post-Soviet Jews are secular. To date, the two have not intersected with one another. The liberalism, egalitarianism and feminism at the heart of much discourse about European Judaism is foreign to many Russians, who are often more attracted to secular culture or to Chabad Lubavitch Hasidism and other embodiments of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish life. This makes Limmud Deutschland's experiment in pluralism and Russian outreach worthy of further study.

Maybe if we stopped seeing the global Jewish world through bi-polar lenses of Israel and 'the Diaspora', the individual and the nation, or the establishment and the margins, and if conversations about German Jewry started seeing the powerful potential, rather than the huge problem, of Russians, Jews-by-Choice, Chabbniks, lesbian feminists and others, Germany could once again take its place as the fount of a European Jewish future.

Notes

1. Sander Gilman raised many of these questions in his book *Jews in Today's German Culture*. The present contribution shows that despite the passage of time, the issues still remain.
2. Lubrich, 'Are Russian Jews Post-Colonial?: Wladimir Kaminer and Identity Politics,' 2, 35–53.
3. On the tension between assimilation and transnational identification in immigrant communities, see Morawska, 'Exploring Diversity in Immigrant Assimilation and Transnationalism,' 1372–1412.
4. Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, 41. The problem of counting Jews is notoriously subjective and even more so in Germany, which has an official Jewish community, the *Gemeinde*, to which about 50% of all Jews living in Germany belong. There are bigger issues about matrilineal versus patrilineal descent, conversion, and other problems that make statistics easily malleable to prove one or the other point.
5. It is not just Russians who have tension with the official community. Liberal Jewish communities also often maintain an oppositional stance to the *Gemeinde* and the Zentralrat (Central Council). For a good overview of the community's centralised structure and those not falling within the structure, see Peck, *Being Jewish*.
6. In fact, there was a general suspicion of Russian Jews' Jewishness from the moment of arrival. See Becker, *Ankommen in Deutschland*. See also her 'Migration and Recognition: Russian Jews in Germany.'
7. Nelly Elias, Larissa Remennik and Jeffrey Peck all write about this phenomenon.
8. Elias, 'Living in Germany, Longing for Israel.'
9. See Peck and Bornemann, *Sojourners*. See also Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany*. See also 'Zu dem Urteil des bundesverwaltungsgerichts,' October 15, 1997 on the official establishment of Adass Jisroel's legal status. Full text of this and other documents defining the community's legal status can be found at www.adassjisroel.de.
10. Remennick, 315–220.
11. Aderet, "'Sweet Revenge,' say new Germans.'
12. On Bubitz' proclamation about the future of German Jewry, see Kahn, *Resurgence of Jewish Life in Germany*, 8.

13. Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater: die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche Erfindung*. See also his *Jews, Germans, Memory—Reconstruction of Jewish Life in Germany* and ‘A Reemergence of German Jewry?’
14. Peck writes about the cosmopolitan landscape of Berlin in the last chapter of *Being Jewish*.
15. Peck, *Being Jewish*, 54.
16. I made two visits to the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue for services and spoke with Rabbi Ederberg as well as several congregants.
17. On Rebling’s upbringing and background in the Yiddish theater, see her own, ‘A Yiddish Folksinger in the Bosom of the Party,’ 61–72. See also Shneer, ‘In Front of the Iron Curtain: Yiddish in East Germany.’
18. Ostow, ‘Becoming Strangers: Jews in Germany’s Five New Provinces.’
19. See for example Elissa Klapheck’s Beit ha-Chidush in Amsterdam: <http://www.beithachidush.nl/>.
20. Interviews with Jalda Rebling, May 2008, Berlin, Germany; January 2009, Boulder CO.
21. See <http://www.ohel-hachidusch.org/home.html>.
22. See www.limmud.de for its tri-lingual approach. The programme book for the conference has *all information* in German, Russian and English.
23. See, for example, Runge’s bilingual article, ‘Juden von unten: das zweite bundesweite Lernfestival Limmud zog 450 Teilnehmer an.’
24. Avidan, ‘Limmud-Festival junger Juden in Berlin.’
25. I will be conducting field research at Limmud Deutschland in May 2011.
26. *Ausgerechnet Deutschland!: Jüdisch-russische Einwanderung in die Bundesrepublik*.
27. Gilman, *Jews in Today’s German Culture*, 2.
28. Pinto, ‘The Jewish Challenge in the New Europe.’ See also her ‘Jewish Space in Europe,’ 179–186 and ‘Towards a European Jewish Identity.’
29. Peck, *Being Jewish*, 115.
30. Lawton, ‘European Models of Community: Can Ambiguity Help?’ 41–2.
31. Joint Distribution Committee, ‘European Jewish Leaders and Opinion Makers’ Survey.’
32. According to Marcelo Dimentshtein, operations director for the Joint Distribution Committee’s International Centre for Community Development, the former soviet union was excluded from the study in order to focus on the European Union. Communication with Dimentshtein, July 2009.
33. Lustig and Leveson, *Turning the Kaleidoscope*, 20.

Notes on contributor

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